

TO ALL ICF AFFILIATED AND
ASSOCIATED ORGANIZATIONS

Circular Letter No. 65/74

Geneva, 28th May, 1974

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Dear Colleagues:

ICF CAMPAIGN PROMOTING EFFECTIVE MEASURES ON PVC-CANCER HAZARD

ICF AFFILIATES ACHIEVE "NO EXPOSURE" STANDARDS IN U.S.

Rapid developments in regard to research and the establishment of new safety standards are occurring thanks to the prompt action by ICF affiliates in a number of countries around the world. Following the initiation of the ICF's World Campaign in January 1974 after the alert on cancer deaths and the confirmation of acro-osteolysis disease among PVC-workers, the concerted Action Program on the health hazards has been producing effective results.

Due to our trade union affiliates' combined efforts, and especially the pioneering work of the United Rubber Workers of America, the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers, and the International Chemical Workers of the U.S.A. under the leadership of URW President Peter Bommarito, and their Health and Safety Directors Louis Baliczky, Anthony Mazzocchi and Larry Ahern resp., as well as the U.K. Transport and General Workers Union and General and Municipal Workers Union, the IG-Chemie-Papier-Keramik in Germany, the Unione Italiana Lavoratori Chimici "UILCID" in Italy, the Swedish Factory Workers Union (Svenska Fabriksarbetareförbundet), Norwegian Chemical and Paperworkers (Norsk Kjemisk Industriarbeiderforbund and Norsk Papirindustriarbeiderforbund), the Australian Rubber Workers and others, our campaign has developed into a highly effective, world-wide action.

As a result, new standards and awareness of the hazard have been achieved in a number of countries, largely due to prompt and effective actions by ICF affiliates:

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President Enar Agren of the Swedish Factory Workers Union (Svenska Fabriksarbetareförbundet) reports that through their Division for Work Environment Matters they succeeded in having Vinyl Chloride gas registered as a toxic substance by the National Board of Product Supervision. This Board has also revoked registered trademarks for a variety of insecticides.

pesticides and similar products containing VC, which can no longer be sold on the market.

Brother Agren further reports that in the one plant in Sweden, which makes Vinyl Chloride Monomer, the management has received instructions to keep exposure levels to 20 ppm for the time being, with an occasional excess up to the 50 ppm level tolerated.

The employers must now keep records of all workers exposed to Vinyl Chloride and Polyvinyl Chloride, including those employed in rubber plants, and the physician in charge is examining all workers who have been in contact with VC and PVC. All the local unions organizing workers in VCM, PVC and PVC-processing plants have been alerted, and letters sent to the Employers' Association requesting full cooperation in a joint investigation of the hazards.

Medical records at the oldest plant in Sweden have, among autoclave workers, brought out two cases of deaths due to cancer of the liver, some time back. However, these two cases were not registered as angiosarcoma - but the diagnosis is now under review, and new scanning of the registers is under way. Records of all workers in the plant are now being collated and cross-checked with the National Cancer Register.

Due to the intervention of the Norwegian Paperworkers (Norsk Papir-industriarbeiderforbund) and the Chemical Workers (Norsk Kjemisk Industri-arbeiderforbund), local unions have now taken the matter up directly with the plant managers and a national investigation has been initiated in co-operation with the National health Service.

Following discovery of numerous cases of acro-osteolysis and several suspected angiosarcoma cases at the Troisdorf plant of Dynamit Nobel in the Federal Republic of Germany, Chemical Industry officers of the IG-Chemie-Papier-Keramik have been actively pushing research projects in conjunction with the Medical Clinic of Bonn University and the Chemical Industry's Joint Union-Management Professional Association (Berufsgenossenschaft der Chemischen Industrie), which is responsible for supervising and monitoring health and safety conditions in the Chemical Industry. New stringent standards of exposure levels are being pressed by the IG-Chemie for the Federal Republic of Germany.

Meanwhile, the U.S. Consumer Product Safety Commission, which is investigating Aerosol products using VCM as a propellant, ordered all makers of Aerosol household products (hair sprays, deodorants, insecticides, etc.) containing VCM to produce data on usage, toxicity, and the period of production. The Agency admits that it is presently considering banning all these products from commercial sales.

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Japanese medical authorities have issued a ban on further sales of these products until further data are at hand.

Similar actions are taking place in Belgium, France, Holland, Turkey, Argentina, Australia and Japan. ICF affiliates in these countries have reported initiating programs at both the company and plant levels in order to

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secure the introduction of adequate safety standards, and guarantee protection of the health of their members in Vinyl Chloride Polymerization and processing.

It should be pointed out that in their investigations most ICF affiliates are discovering, in varying degrees, the existence of acro-osteolysis, a disease also associated with Polyvinyl Chloride production, which has been on the medical records for at least twenty years. Affiliates are therefore intensifying health programs and measures in regard to this "Plastic Disease," which is another example of a long-known but little publicized health hazard in the chemical industry.

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INDUSTRY SECRECY IMPOSED

It has now been confirmed beyond doubt that the research work into the relation between Vinyl Chloride Monomer gas and angiosarcoma of the liver has deliberately been withheld from trade union and public knowledge. Prof. C. Maltoni, who participated in the New York Academy of Sciences Seminar on PVC, which ICF affiliates helped to organize, indicated that his studies on rats, initiated in Italy in 1971 by Montedison in cooperation with ICI (Great Britain), Rhône-Poulenc (France) and Solvay (Belgium), were made known to American Companies in 1972, but put under a secrecy agreement which curtailed the release of annual test data. It was Prof. Maltoni's data which confirmed that in rats the safe concentration was not even demonstrated at 50 ppm; at that time, the general safety standard set by the U.S. Government and others was 500 ppm.

Since January 1974, when the active campaign began, our American Colleagues, the United Rubber Workers, the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers, and the International Chemical Workers Union in cooperation with Prof. Irving J. Selikoff of the Mount Sinai School of Medicine of the City University of N.Y., succeeded in getting the standards drastically reduced in the United States - from 500 ppm to "no-detectable" exposure levels. This is to be considered a major breakthrough, and we would like to extend congratulations to our affiliates for the excellent work carried out. By their actions we have succeeded in securing new standards in a number of countries.

In our Circular Letter No. 55/74 on our PVC-Campaign, we informed you that the U.S. Department of Labor and the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) were projecting a no-detectable exposure standard for VCM. This standard consists of exposures up to 1 ppm - as measured by the best available monitoring equipment. That the exposure standard has been brought from 500 ppm down to 1 ppm in this relatively short period of time is further evidence for the effectiveness of the campaign, and the recognition of the inherent dangers.

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We will certainly seek to have this accepted as a world standard at the ICF World Trade Union Seminar on the Threat of Cancer in the Chemical and Allied Industries, which the ICF will organize in Geneva in September/October. This Seminar is bringing together leading medical scientists in the field of health hazards in the chemical industry.

and ICF Union officers and health and safety directors around the world to review the world picture and formulate an effective Action Program for curing new and more effective enforcement of adequate health standards. This Seminar is being organized by ICF in cooperation with the New York Academy of Sciences.

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INDUSTRY MOUNTS COUNTER-OFFENSIVE

This new no-detectable exposure standard for VCM is to go into effect on June 1, 1974. However, already management spokesmen are complaining that it would require sensitive monitoring equipment throughout the work place, oxygen-supplied respirators, annual paid medical examinations of employees, etc. It is to be expected that the economics of profit will be organized against a rapid establishment of the protection of the workers' health.

Some like Mr. Barnes, a director of ICI, are going as far as to claim that management has already largely eliminated the hazard by newly introduced improvements. But an article produced in the London Times attributed the following statement to Mr. Barnes, which, if true, constitutes a very serious lack of responsibility and conscience on the part of ICI. In fact, certain companies are already operating under 20 ppm thresholds which Mr. Barnes states cannot be done by the British Chemical Industry. Mr. Barnes was speaking in his capacity of Chairman of the British Chemical Industry Association Committee on Vinyl Chloride. Such a position is indefensible and is rejected not only by ICF affiliates but by all responsible medical scientists as well.

We quote excerpts from the article in the London Times: "The British economy will rapidly grind down if all exposure to a cancer-causing gas used to make Polyvinyl Chloride (PVC) is banned, Mr. Barry Barnes, a director of ICI, said yesterday."

"We believe the residual risk is already very low and could be zero, but we intend to reduce levels still farther", he said. But if the PVC industry was made to guarantee that there was no risk, there would have to be no exposure to the gas and the industry would grind to a halt.

"The industry would not be able to reduce the level below 10 parts," but he said, "There is no evidence that levels of 50 parts a million can cause liver cancer, but there is equally no evidence that it does not."

A large Swiss Chemical Company released the statement that in their new modern plants, the autoclaves were absolutely leak-proof and no gas was escaping into the work environment. Such assertions are dangerously misleading as they neglect to point out that the greatest dangers were for workers who cleaned the autoclaves after each two or three polymerization batches and not from leakages from faulty or inadequate equipment in modern plants.

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In compiling our picture of the actions of our affiliated organizations, we have asked all affiliates to keep ICF headquarters informed on developments

in their countries in regard to changes in the safety standards, new research undertakings, and measures to ensure protection in both VCM and PVC processing and utilization of end products.

Fraternally yours,

C. Levinson

Charles Levinson
Secretary General

Enclosure

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